DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 477 CS 506 703

AUTHOR Lazier-Smith, Linda
TITLE Demographics vs. Demigoddesses: A New "Generation" of Advertising Images to Women.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (72nd, Washington, DC, August 10-13, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; Comparative Analysis; Content Analysis; *Cultural Context; Females; Mass Media Effects; Media Research; Periodicals; *Sex Bias; Sex Stereotypes
IDENTIFIERS *Advertisements; Media Appraisal; Media Imagery; Status Quo

ABSTRACT

To answer the question of whether today's ads are culturally faithful in the depiction and portrayal of women, a study compared the findings of two 1970s studies of advertisements in four national magazines--"Ms.," "Playboy," "Time," and "Newsweek" as well as a film reflecting the findings--with a replication of studies done in the 1980s. In the new study, 10 ads from each monthly issue of each magazine for 1 year (1986-87) were coded, and a scale that attempted to "measure" sexism was applied. Content analysis revealed that: (1) advertising does reflect a cultural faithfulness, but not demographics or being "true to the facts of customary beliefs, social forms and material traits"; (2) the ads reflected the culture's stereotypes, bigotries, dominant values, sexism, chauvinism, and biases; (3) the ads also reflected the traditional balance of power, a tendency toward the status quo, and the confusion in the culture concerning women's role; and (4) although the demographics (the math) has changed dramatically, the attitude (the mentality) has not. (One table of data is included, and 23 references are appended.) (MS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED309477

DEMOGRAPHICS vs. DEMIGODDESSES:

A NEW 'GENERATION' OF

ADVERTISING IMAGES TO WOMEN

By

Linda Lazier-Smith, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH 43210

Presented to the Advertising Division of the national conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, Washington, D.C., August 1989.

CS506703

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linda Lazier-Smith

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

DEMOGRAPHICS vs. DEMIGODDESSES:
A NEW 'GENDERATION' OF
ADVERTISING IMAGES TO WOMEN

> Scene: Network TV. Commercial cutaway. A 30-second spot for Michelin tires starts. A tire, on its side, pulls on screen and cruises across floor of blank set. Inside the tire, "riding" in it as if it were a miniature convertible, are two babies, an infant "couple" apparently on a date.)

DDB/Needham Worldwide, one of the nation's largest advertising agencies, attracted considerable attention for client Michelin Tires with this 1987 TV commercial and several others in its "baby series." The creative team achieved the ultimate--the ability to strongly and directly convey its central message (Michelin tires are safe enough for even the most precious of cargoes, babies) without saying so in actual words.

The baby couple is adorable; shown from the waist up, seated in the little tire "convertible," him with his tiny arm around his date, his "babe."

A perfect mix of the "borrowed interest" technique (in this case, babies, in others it might be puppies or music or animated characters or a spokeshero) plus simplicity (the tire is "driven" within a blank white environment so only the couple and product are central focus) plus cleverness, plus directing technique made the spot highly attention-getting and memorable, the first two goals of advertising.

NOTE: The author can now be contacted at CRE, Inc. Advertising, 400 Victoria Centre, 22 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204 where she is creative director and directs agency research.

But that is not all. The commercial conveys additional messages other than safety--again without actually or orally saying so.

The 30-second spot connotes that males and females are destined to couple, a hefty message to lob at a 10-month-old. Additionally, it is implied that the male will be in control and the female will be in ave.

The ad also confirms or revalidates the stereotype of males and cars, and, that males drive and females are decorative adjunct passengers.

But, more important, this cute commercial with the cute babies in a cute situation makes a significant, albeit silent, statement about the role and status of females in American society.

The boy baby, you see, is attired in a tiny dress shirt, a miniature sportcoat and wee Wayfarer sunglasses.

The girl baby, except for a pink hairbow and a strand of pearls, is naked.

Advertising. . .15- or 30-second broadcast sales blurbs interrupting Oprah, Monday Night Football or General Hospital; 7-by-10-inch pretty magazine page messages. . .brief, small, terse, seemingly simple. . . no one <u>really</u> takes these concise capitalistic communications seriously, do they?

Not even if the messages are part of a $100 billion a year communication industry?

Not even if the average person, every day, is exposed to somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,800 messages?

Not even if these brief blips are "pervasive and persuasive, environmental in nature, persistently encountered and involuntarily experienced" (Pollay, 1986, p. 18)?

Not even if the ubiquitous messages pervade all the media, forming "a vast superstructure with an apparently autonomous existence" (Williamson, 1978, p. 11)?

Not even if ads make up "the most consistent body of material in the mass media" (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986, p. 3)?

Not even then?

Advertising: Institution-Turned-Entity

Critics and commentators from every discipline have grappled with advertising's potential for power. It has been called "the most potent influence in adapting and changing habits and modes of life, affecting what we eat, what we wear and the work and play of the whole nation" (Fox, 1984, p.97).

It has been compared with "such long-standing institutions as the school and the church in the magnitude of its social influence" because it "dominates the media, it has vast power in the shaping of popular standards, and it is really one of the very limited groups of institutions which exercise social control" (Potter, 1954, p. 167).

McLuhan, who has said advertising reflects our "collective daydreams," also has commented that "ours is the first age in which many thousands of the best-trained minds have made it a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind. . .to get inside in order to manipulate, exploit and control" (1951, p. v).

Criticisms and concerns have been vented by psychologists, who view advertising as a source of learning or conditioning, with cognitive and affective results; by sociologists who speak to the role modeling aspects and advertising's impact on social behaviors; by anthropologists, who examine the rituals, symbols and cultural meanings involved; by educators, who question the influence on development, and, by communication specialists, critics and commentators, who often address the propagandistic role of advertising and fret over its influence on media content. (Pollay, 1986)

The critics concur on one point. Advertising is its own force, an institution-turned entity. Society has not put it on a pedestal--indeed, many consumers still scoff, claiming they are unaffected by ads--but the evidence more and more suggests that society has elevated advertising to an invisible podium from which we learn and are influenced.

You've Come a Long Way, Baby??

Images of Women in Media

Advertising, in the process of selling products and services, tends to sell supplemental images as well (Whipple & Courtney, 1980). If these images are of women, and if they are judged to be demeaning or trivializing or chronically stereotypical, they "may contribute to the maintenance of some undesirable aspects of the status quo in our society" (Whipple & Courtney, 1980, p. 53).

There has been "unanimous agreement over the past two decades that the images of women projected by the media constituted a main obstacle to eliminating discrimination against women throughout the

world and a main factor in preserving traditional sexist attitudes towards them" (UNESCO, 1980, p. 52).

This "restriction of women's interests to sexual and domestic concerns implies a corresponding lack of competence and confidence in the public domains of career and achievement skills" (Jennings, Geis & Brown, 1980).

The 222-page report Unequal Opportunities: The Case of Women and the Media, which documents the findings of a two-year international research survey commissioned by UNESCO in 1980 (the mid-point of the United Nations Decade for Women), explains well the concerns about the treatment of women by the media:

> The first (concern) is directed explicitly towards the relationship between media presentations of women and men, and objective demographic fact: for instance, the extent to which the media misrepresent the real proportions of women vis-a-vis men in the population or in the workforce; or the extent to which social class, age, occupational status are ascribed to the two sexes in a way which contradicts reality. (Gallagher, 1981, p. 35)

The report does not insist on a pure, faithful and accurate representation of reality; it accepts that the media deal with a version of fantasy. It asks instead that portrayals reflect realistic proportions of women within the occupations or situations, "in other words, that within the fantasy there should be consistency with reality" (p. 35).

There is now considerable evidence that one facet of mass communications--advertising, which comprises at least half the con-

tent of the traditional media--has in the past consistently stereotyped women in traditional portrayals.

> There is overwhelming evidence that advertisements present traditional, limited, and often demeaning stereotypes of women and men. It is recognized, of course, that stereotypes in advertising can serve a useful function by conveying an image quickly and clearly, and that there is nothing inherently wrong with using characterizations of roles that are easily identifiable. However, when limited and demeaning stereotypes are as pervasive as those involved in advertising's portrayal of the sexes, it becomes important to question whether those stereotypes might result in negative and undesirable social consequences. (Courtney & Whipple, 1983, p. 45)

Webster defines stereotypes as standardized mental pictures that represent an oversimplified opinion or uncritical judgment. Lippman, who has provided the crux of stereotype "theory", claims that the abbreviated communiques become "the cores of our personal tradition, the defenses of our position in society" which give "an ordered, consistent picture of the world to which our habits, tastes, capacities, comforts and hopes have adjusted themselves" (p. 63).

Stereotypes, or "pictures in our heads," <u>can</u> save interpretive effort. They can also short-circuit or block the capacity for objective and analytic judgment in favor of well-worn, catch-all reactions--which gives them the potential to shortchange.

In print advertising, the results of more than a dozen studies, most all conducted in the 1970s, have been astonishingly similar with regards to stereotypes:

--woman's place is in the home;

--women are dependent on men;

--women do not make independent and important decisions;

--women are shown in few occupational roles;

--women view themselves and are viewed by others as sex objects. (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Wagner & Banos, 1973; Sexton & Haberman, 1974; Millum, 1975; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975; Pingree, Hawkins, Butler & Paisley, 1976; Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; McDuff-Burnam, 1977; Weinberger, Petroshius & Westin, 1979; Goffman, 1979; Wohleter & Lammers, 1980; England, Kuhn & Gardner, 1981.)

The issues and the findings from television content analyses were similar (and as debilitating) as those found in the print studies. Taken together, the TV studies do two things: (1) point out three prevalent female roles: maternal, housekeeping and aesthetic, and, (2) point out flagrant discrimination: women and girls were seen far less frequently than men, they were shown to have different characteristics from males (less authoritative, active, powerful, rational and decisive and more youthful and concerned with attractiveness), they were housewives or in restricted low-status, subservient occupations (and fewer roles) and they were depicted as less intelligent than males. (Dominick & Rauch, 1974; Silverstein & Silverstein, 1974; Courtney & Whipple, 1974; McArthur & Resko, 1975; Culley & Bennett, 1976; Fox, 1978; Maracek, Piliavin, et al., 1978; O'Donnell & O'Donnell, 1978; Mamay & Simpson, 1978; Tan, 1979; Schneider & Schneider, 1979; Schneider, 1979; Scheibe, 1979; Kilbourne, 1981; Sharits & Lammers, 1982; Caballero & Solomon, 1984; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Tucker, 1984; Downs &

Harrison, 1985; Merlo & Smith, 1987).

The anomalous fact is that while images of women as documented in advertising research hardly changed from study to study throughout the 1970s, both demography and attitudes among women changed dramatically (Courtney & Whipple, 1985).

The 'Third American Revolution'

When advertising agency D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles asked people to "name your ideal job," what topped the list for women was "to be head of my own company."

That, a senior editor of Working Woman magazine said in that publication's 298-page 10th Anniversary issue entitled "How Working Women Have Changed America," "goes to show just how far women's ambitions now stretch: no more mere room of one's own, if you please. . .but a bustling business will do nicely" (Hellwig, 1986, p. 150).

That also is indicative that women, long socialized to be the homebodies, are now not only in the workforce, but they sometimes own pieces of it, entrepreneurially and via stock portfolios, corporate boardrooms and management titles.

This "surging tide of women into the workforce over the past 15 years is what economists are calling the most profound change of our century" and what sociologists and feminists are tagging the "third successful revolution in American history" (after the American and the Industrial), a revolution that has "reached beyond women's own lives and changed the very way America lives, works, and even thinks" (Hellwig, p. 129).

What started as a dramatic shift in the labor market (in 1970, about half of all women between the ages of 25 and 54 years had

jobs; by 1986, 70 percent of that age did) "soon sent tremors through the entire economy and then beyond" (Hellwig, p. 129).

Even Harvard professors of political economy note the benchmark: "We haven't seen anything like it in this century," says Harvard's Robert Reich, Ph.D. "If I were to list the social changes as they have affected the economy and the culture, I would place first the changing role of women, including the influx of women into the workplace" (Hellwig, p. 130).

These work force changes have dramatically altered the employment, financial and familial aspects of American life. New doors opened to women, with more opportunities, more social visibility, more voice, more decision-making and more all-around societal impact.

The Research Perspective

Given advertising's goal to connect to the consumer, and given the fact advertising is a market-driven enterprise based on extensive monitoring of society (partially through consumer research) and its trends, then it becomes appropriate to assume that advertising would indeed reflect that society, both the social changes of the past decade and the social ramifications of those changes.

Beyond assuming, we can hypothesize:

> As women's position in society has changeds,
> the images of women in ads will have changed
> in the same direction.

New Research Replicates Past Studies

Three past studies have been considered benchmarks in advertising stereotype/role research: the Consciousness Scale for Sexism,

Goffman's "gender advertisements" and Kilbourne's film on female ad images. The research reported in this paper centers on the replication, via content analysis, of the three in what is believed to be the first print stereotype study of the 1980s. First, the original studies will be discussed; then, the findings of the new research will given.

The central study, the Consciousness Scale for Sexism, was developed by Butler-Paisley and Paisley-Butler (1974) and elaborated by Pingree, Hawkins, Butler and Paisley (1976). The original scale was applied to advertisements portraying women in four national magazines--Ms., Playboy, Time, and Newsweek--coding 10 ads in each monthly issue for one year. The scale attempts to "measure" sexism by analyzing ad visuals via five levels:

LEVEL 1: Put Her Down

Presentations of women at this level include the dumb blond, the sex object, and the whimpering victim. The woman is portrayed as being less than a person, a two-dimensional image. Examples of such images are common in men's magazines such as Playboy, in advertisements where the woman's body is included as a decorative object, and in situation comedies where the woman relies on others to do her thinking for her.

LEVEL 2: Keep Her In Her Place

Traditional strengths and capacities of women are acknowledged, but tradition also dictates 'womanly' roles. Women are shown functioning well as wives, mothers, secretaries, clerks, teachers, nurses. Negative Level II images show women struggling

with roles that are 'beyond them' (business executives, doctors, editors, etc.) or in which they develop unwomanly traits.

LEVEL 3: Give Her Two Places

Consciousness Level III represents the level of many 'progressive' media images of women. In entertainment (e.g. television drama), the woman can be a lawyer or architect as long as she has dinner on the table for her husband at six. In reportage, the woman executive is described as grandmotherly, and the interview eventually turns to her favorite recipes. It is the career that is often viewed as the 'something extra.' Housework and mothering come first. The image is that women may sometimes work outside the home professionally, but always work in the home. An example is the ad with the woman Ph.D. in biochemistry discussing what she gives her children for breakfast.

LEVEL 4: Acknowledge That She Is Fully Equal

These are rare among media images. The important distinction between this level and Level III (which also allows women to be professionals) is that Level IV images do not remind us that housework and mothering are non-negotiably the woman's work as well.

LEVEL 5: Nonstereotypic

Individual women and men are viewed as superior to each other in some respects, inferior in other respects. The dogmatism of Level IV (women shall be equal to men) is unnecessary, because individuals are not judged by their sex. (p. 194-5)

The 1973-74 study found 75 percent of all ads to be at the two lowest, or most sexist, levels--48 percent at Level 2, considered by the researchers to be the status quo, with 27 percent at Level 1.

Nineteen percent were at "equality" Level 4 but only two percent were at nonstereotypical Level 5. Four percent were at Level 3.

The second benchmark study was done by sociologist Erving Goffman and has been popularized in his book Gender Advertisements (1979). In that book, he concludes that women are weakened by advertising portrayals via six categories:

1. Relative size (shown smaller or lower, relative to men);
2. Feminine touch (women constantly touching themselves);
3. Function ranking (occupational);
4. Family scenes;
5. Ritualization of subordination (proclivity to lying down at inappropriate times, women using bashful knee bends, canting postures, puckish, expansive smiles);
6. Licensed withdrawal (women never quite a part of the scene, possibly via far-off gazes).

In essence, Goffman finds that ads are highly ritualized versions of the parent-child relationship with women treated largely as children.

The third "study" is a film which uses examples that reflect the findings listed above and which includes examples from Jean Kilbourne's qualitative assessment of advertising. Her first film, released in 1976, was titled "Killing Us Softly." Her second film, a much-awaited and demanded update released in late 1987, is titled "Still Killing Us Softly," to which the "still" summarizes her assessment of a lack of improvement in imagery toward and about women.

Kilbourne's is a provocative collection of examples selected purposefully to show the extent of, and problems with, advertising's

sexual imagery and its implication that sexual access to the female is the reward for buying many products. Scientifically-drawn samples have illustrated virtually the same conclusions as does Kilbourne's film. The film achieves dramatic impact by running hundreds of ads before the viewer, leaving Kilbourne's conclusions inescapable.

Ad Sexism 'Improves' Two Percentage Points

The new study replicated the method, categories and procedures of the Scale for Sexism and of Goffman's sexist categories. All ads in the four magazines from July 1986 to June 1987 were coded to the sexism scale (inter-coder agreement was 93.5 percent); all Goffman traits within these same ads were also coded. The findings from both analyses were then applied to Kilbourne's film.

The conclusions to the 1986 replication of the Scale for Sexism study are simple:

> The images of women in 1986 ads did not significantly change from the images found in 1973 ads. Portrayals did not "improve" overall to reflect women's increased social status.

Given the statistical analyses of the data, it can be concluded that not only has sexism not improved, but the 1986 ads, in the aggregate, are slightly more sexist than the 1973 sample. (Kruskal-Wallis 1-way anova (hereafter K-W) mean rank: 1973=495.4; 1986=483.6. Higher score=less sexism. K-W chi square=.47, p=.490).

Central tendency showed median level (score) for both samples to be Level 2, the traditional sphere; mode level actually worsened, from Level 2 in 1973 to Level 1 in 1986; mean level remained vir-

tually constant, from 2.21 in 1973 to 2.28 in 1986. A median statistical test showed no significance (Chi square=1.28, p=.257).

The critical finding is that although distribution of ads by level has shifted (Kolmogorov-Smirnov (hereafter K-S) Z=1.485, p=.024), the shift has not improved the overall level of sexism in ads--or, that "improvements" such as a higher percentage of portrayals at the "best" level, nonstereotypic Level 5 (from 2 percent in 1973 to 11 percent in 1986), are offset by the 10 percent increase in portrayals at Level 1, the sex object/decoration/male adjunct category.

Table 1. Comparison of 1973 and 1986 Ads

Females--A Scale for Sexism

Level	1973	1986
1	27%	37%
2	48	35
3	4	3
4	19	15
5	2	11
	N=447	N=530

However, it must be noted that the distribution of ads, by level, creates different dispersion shapes, indicating a leveling of sexist tendencies.

Fewer 1986 ads were coded to Level 2 (status quo--women in the home, in womanly occupations or coupled with a male), the level which ties woman to the traditional nurturing/public-vs.-private-sphere role, the role the social statistics show is no longer primary. Fewer also fell at Levels 3 and 4, levels that put woman in "man's" world.

In summary, the 1986 ads showed significant differences from 1973 in distribution by Level (chi square=48.73, 4df, p=.000), specifically at Levels 1, 2 and 5.

It should be noted that even though Levels 1 and 2 fluctuated over the two studies, cumulative percentages of ads in the two lowest or most sexist levels improved only marginally--from 75 percent in 1973 to 72 percent in 1986.

Levels were coded by "type" (e.g. Level 1 could be decoration, sex object or total incompetent). The largest type for all female ads was "decoration" (Level 1) with 28 percent (N=148) of all female ads. Second was the "couple" portrayal (Level 2) at 21 percent (N=113).

Comparison of Female Ads for Individual Magazines

It was hypothesized at the start of the replication that gender-based magazines (Ms. and Playboy) would not have changed significantly in the Levels of ad portrayals, primarily on the supposition that advertisers attracted to these magazines' audiences/consumers (who were attracted by the magazine's editorial philosophy) would "mimic" or "reflect" the tone of that policy (be it sex orientation or liberation orientation) in order to connect to those audiences.

It was also hypothesized that the greatest upgrade in non-sexist visual imagery would be in the "mass" publications for more generalized, dual-sex audiences. Time and Newsweek, in reporting contemporary society, would attract like-minded audiences, and, hence, advertisers with similar messages.

Support for the gender hypotheses was mixed: Playboy's was upheld, it stayed relatively constant in overall sexism; the Ms. hypothesis was rejected, its levels became more sexist overall. The mass publications hypothesis was supported.

Ms. had the lowest mean rank of the four publications. Mean ranks connote sexism--the lower score relates to the lower, sexist levels on the scale. _(K-W chi square=24.76, p=.000).

Playboy's visuals shifted in levels, with fewer portrayals at sexist Level 1 (dropping from 54 percent in 1973 to 40 percent in 1986) and significantly more at nonstereotypical Level 5 (from .8 percent in 1973 to 9.8 percent in 1986, a growth almost double to Ms. and a percentage of Level 5 ads that is 1.4 percent larger than Ms. (Playboy chi square=13.67, 4df, p=.008).

However, these shifts in dispersion did not affect aggregate sexism, with no real differences indicated between 1973 and 1986 Playboy samples on the K-S test (K-S Z=1.11, p=.16). This supports the hypothesis of no change.

Ms. portrayals differed significantly from 1973 to 1986 (K-S Z=2.52, p=.000). In general, the shifts indicate more sexism, with considerably more ads at sexist Level 1 (from 16 percent in 1973 to 48 percent in 1986) and fewer at "equality" Level 4 (a drop from 36 percent to 15 percent).

Ms. did show growth at nonstereotypic Level 5, from 3 percent to 8 percent, however, that 5 percent shift was less than for the other magazines, which logged 9, 13 and 14 percent upward shifts.

Ms. also had a decrease in ads at traditional Level 2, from 40 percent to 23 percent. (Ms. chi square=37.77, 4df, p=.000)

Both Time and Newsweek showed differences in dispersion over the two samples, Time statistically so (K-S Z=1.38, p=.04). Newsweek was not statistically significant but levels did show a trend in the same direction.

Goffman traits did show some improvement, with three categories--relative size, function ranking and family scenes--appearing so infrequently that they could be considered to no longer apply. Unfortunately, the largest coded category, ritual of subordination, could also be considered the most limiting or trivializing.

The findings of these two analyses support the contentions of Kilbourne's film of ongoing sexist tendencies.

The Advertising/Marketing Perspective

These findings are troublesome for several reasons. A central reason is that advertising is supposedly market-driven. The advertising industry has long been dependent on demographics and market/consumer research as the basis for construction of advertising messages.

This "math" or "market" or "monitoring" orientation is what allows advertisers to develop messages recognizable to the consumer and her lifestyle, to create a "shared experience" with the consumer, one that provides a relatively accurate semblance of society,

especially of the "new woman" and her multiple roles and responsibilities.

It would seem that this demographic or math approach would eliminate the "myth" found in former studies since ads based on the market perspective would seemingly reflect both the social changes of the past decade (the demographics of women entering the work-force) and the social ramifications of those changes (an increase in social status, therefore, a decrease in sexist/limiting imagery).

The Conclusions

Demigoddesses (mythical beings that seem to approach "perfection" or the divine) vs. demographics. Or so it seems in the end assessment. With nearly three-fourths of the female ads in the 1986 study coded to the two most sexist, stereotypical levels of the scale, we can paint the following portrayal of the American woman:

> She is athletic, but never sweats. She is beautiful, but wears no makeup. She is working, but never tired. Aging, but not wrinkled. Breathtaking, but brainless. Intelligent, but humorless. She is everything. She is nothing. She is advertising to women. (Sharkey, 1987, p. WR4)

The increase in both sexist Level 1 images and nonsexist Level 5 images causes conclusional confusion--have things worsened or improved? Or do we simply seem to have a new "genderation" of sexism, perhaps a "Ms. Bimbo"?

Demographics--in all its mathematical, statistical, percentaged glory--evidently is no match for old-fashioned sexism. The numbers don't count. The demographic- and data-driven marketing-based perspective doesn't hold.

Coming to conclusions means coming to grips with an almost shocking, blatant sexism, an unexpectedly unnerving smack from an unexpected "reality."

Coming to Terms With Social Reality

We expected to see the new "social reality" reflected in the "modern" ads--a reality markedly different from the reality reflected in the academic analyses of the 1970s.

However, our first conclusion must be that "social reality" was not the correct term. To expect it was wrong. And, with hindsight, we can see that what we actually wanted "reflected" was a cultural faithfulness--an accuracy in details about our beliefs, social forms and traits.

The critical question, then, should be: are today's ads culturally faithful in the depiction and portrayal of women?

Un-powering Instead of Empowering

Culture is central to communication, according to Dervin and Clark (1988). Communication, they say, is thought of in three fundamental ways: as content, structure and procedure. "The content of communication comprises the 'what' of a culture. The structure comprises the institutional entities designated as 'keepers' of the what. The procedures of communication are the norms/rules about 'how to do' the keeping (the constituting and reconstituting)."

Gerbner (Tuchman, Daniels & Benet, 1978) explains the apparent lag between social or cultural fact and imagery. Gerbner says culture's main function is to cultivate resistance to change, to get its members to accept the norms and values.

Should a culture encounter a social movement (the threat or promise to restructure a particular set of social relations--as is the case with women's entry into the workforce), Gerbner suggests it will "manage" it in one of two ways: by resistance or by images.

If, as Gerbner suggests, we recognize media images of women as an area that defines/portrays either status or domination, then we must realize that the issue is not one of imagery but of power.

This leads to our first major conclusion:

> Advertising <u>does</u> reflect a cultural faithfulness, but not to demographics or to being "true to the facts of customary beliefs, social forms and material traits."

Instead, the ads reflect the traditional balance of power. They reflect critical components of our culture: its stereotypes, its bigotries, its biases. Its dominant values. A tendency toward the status quo. The ongoingness of the traditional. But, even more, its chauvinism and its sexism.

The ads reflect, but they reflect the mythical moreso than the mathematical. Flawless, poreless, decorative females. Young, thin, perfect. Coupled or mated. America's ideal woman.

The ads reflect the confusion in our culture of what women are. In advertising, as we grope with what we'll let today's woman <u>do</u> or <u>be</u>, we at least agree on how she'll <u>look</u>.

Although the demographics (the math) has changed dramatically; the attitude (the mentality) has not. This, then, is our second conclusion. We seem to be suffering from a cultural lag--our cul-

ture's beliefs and attitudes and opinions on women are lagging behind the reality about women. The ads reflect that lag.

Cultural Lag Leads to Ideological "Lag"

Tuchman (1978) offers an explanation. She says that nonmaterial conditions (i.e., status)--which shape symbols--change more slowly than do material conditions. Our values, attitudes and beliefs will change slower than the actual state of affairs. Women work, yes, we all know and see that; but the symbolic portrayal will lag behind the actual enter-the-workforce footsteps.

Cultural lag offers a key to explaining perhaps the real reason why, some 25 years after publication of The Feminine Mystique, and some 15 years after the start of the workforce revolution, we still find sexist ads.

Cultural lag is the starting block for understanding the sexist findings: cultural lag contributes to sociological ambivalence which contributes to cognitive stagnation which contributes to ideological lag.

As Vivian Gornick says in her introduction to Goffman's Gender Advertisements (1979):

> Advertisements depict for us not necessarily how we actually behave as men and women but how we think men and women behave. This depiction serves the social purpose of convincing us that this is how men and women are, or want to be, or should be, not only in relation to themselves but in relation to each other. They orient men and women to the idea of men and women acting in concert with each other in the larger play or scene or arrangement that is our social life. That orientation ac-

complishes the task a society has of maintaining an essential order, an undisturbed on-goingness, regardless of the actual experience of its participants.

This cultural training leads not only to limitations but to "sociological ambivalence" (Merton & Barber, 1963). Ambivalence--being pulled in psychologically opposed directions such that the person has conflict and contradiction expressed in mingled feelings, mingled beliefs and mingled actions--is built into the structure of social statuses and roles, say Merton & Barber.

This seems most definitely true of American society's stance on women.

Sociological ambivalence coupled with psychological ambivalence could be considered to lead to a mental stalemate or cognitive stagnation/paralysis. Such an individual cessation of the incorporation of social data into personal (and hence, collective) consciousness would quite naturally affect ideology, the "interpretative scheme used by social groups to make the world more intelligible to themselves" (Bullock, Stallybrass & Trombley, 1988, p. 405).

What Can Be Done?

We must realize and then remember something critical about these messages: status quo ad messages come from another basic source--work routines and traditions in advertising agencies.

Media organization and production routines add deadlines and performance pressure to the media mix. Messagemakers need to make messages quickly; messages that hopefully needn't be reworked or rewritten, for time and especially for profit reasons (and profit

to the multiple parties involved); messages that will gain in-agency and client approval with the least amount of hassle; messages that will be lauded and will hopefully lead to bigger and better assignments; messages that might win awards, new accounts or some type of attention; messages that are "safe."

These various production "needs"--along with the quirky matter that the messagemaker simultaneously "works" for three parties: herself (to outshine the other writers and secure the best assignments, pay raises or other perks); the agency; and, the client--point toward a fast, nonthinking, go-with-the-known, "the way we've always seen/done/believed it" approach.

Content is also influenced by journalists' socialization. Most messagemakers' socialization includes a history of virtually noninterruptive sexist ads, as documented by the previous studies of both print and broadcast media. A steady diet of flawless, poreless limited-function females would most likely encourage similar traditional expectations.

Past ads will have been the socializer to the messagemaker, who makes similar ads and sends them out to society, which then sends the messages to women, clients and future messagemakers. Thus, distorted ads beget more distorted ads resulting from "the way we've always seen/done/believed it" mentality.

The Final Conclusion

So what does this all mean?

If we believe that magazines have a great impact on American society (the Magazine Publishers Association estimates that 94 percent of Americans read 11.6 magazines each a month) and if we be-

lieve that magazine ads are modern-day Lewis Carrollesque looking glasses (where spending is saving and being an individual means being just like everyone else and all women are beautiful and childish) and if we believe that the institution of advertising has great power as discussed earlier, then we must now sit back and sigh.

Cultural lag and dominant ideology are no small issues to "fix."

It seems that ongoing sexist ads will continue the ideology which will continue the lag which will continue the sexism which will continue the circle. . .genderation after genderation.

To break the cycle we must change either the messages or the messagemakers. Or both.

Perhaps it is with research realizations such as these that we can start. We can ask the messagemakers (predominantly women at that) to rise to new levels of awareness--from Level 1 to Levels 4 and 5.

REFERENCES

Bullock, Alan, Stallybrass, Oliver, & Trombley, Stephen (1988). The Harper dictionary of modern thought. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Butler-Paisley, Matilda, & Paisley-Butler, William J. (1974, August). Sexism in the media: frameworks for research. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, San Diego.

Courtney, Alice E., & Whipple, Thomas W. (1985). Female role portrayals in advertising and communication effectiveness: a review. Journal of Advertising, 14, 4-8, 17.

Courtney, Alice E., & Whipple, Thomas W. (1983). Sex stereotyping in advertising. Lexington, Mass.: Lex-ington Books.

Dervin, Brenda, & Clark, Kathleen D. (1988). Communication as cultural identity: the invention mandate. Paper presented at the International Association of Mass Communications Research annual meeting, Barcelona, Spain.

Fox, Stephen (1984). The mirror makers. New York: Morrow.

Gallagher, Margaret (1981). Unequal opportunities: the case of women and the media. Paris: The Unesco Press.

Goffman, Erving (1979). Gender advertisements. New York: Colophon Books.

Hellwig, Basia (1986, November). How working women have changed America. Tenth Anniversary Edition. Working Woman, pp. 129-150.

Jennings, Joyce, Geis, Florence L., & Brown, Virginia (1980). Influence of television commercials on women's self-confidence and independent judgment. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38, 203-210.

Kilbourne, Jean (Producer and Moderator). (1987). Still killing us softly: advertising images of women. [Film]. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Documentary Films.

Leiss, William, Kline, Stephen & Jhally, Sut (1986). Social communication in advertising: persons, products and images of well-being. Toronto: Metheun.

Lippmann, Walter (1922). Public opinion. New York: The Free Press.

McLuhan, Marshall (1951). The mechanical bride. Boston: Beacon.

Merton, Robert K., & Barber, Elinor (1963). Sociological Ambivalence. In Edward A. Tiryakian (Ed.), Sociological Theory, Values and Sociocultural Change (pp. 91-121). London: Free Press of Glencoe.

Pingree, Suzanne, Hawkins, Robert P., Butler, Matilda, & Paisley, William (1976). A scale of sexism. Journal of Communication, 26, 193-200.

Pollay, Richard W. (1986). The distorted mirror: reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising. Journal of Marketing, 50, 18-36.

Potter, David M. (1954). People of plenty: economic abundance and the American character. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sharkey, Betsy. (1987, July 6). The invisible woman. Adweek, pp. W.R. 4-8.

Tuchman, Gaye, Daniels, Arlene Kaplan, & Benet, James (Eds.). (1978). Hearth and home: images of women in the mass media. New York: Oxford University Press.

UNESCO (1980). Images of women in the media. In Women in the Media. United Nations.

Whipple, Thomas W., & Courtney, Alice E. (1980). How to portray women in TV commercials. Journal of Advertising Research, 20, 53-59.

Williamson, Judith (1978). Decoding advertisements: ideology and meaning in advertising. London: Marion Boyars.